

(We) have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty

by William MacDonald

Transcript

“(We) have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but, by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” (2 Cor. 4:2)

On the previous page, we noted three areas in which the cults expose themselves as being untrue to the Christian faith that has been once-for-all delivered unto the saints. There are other characteristics of the cults of which we should not only be aware but which we should carefully avoid in our own Christian fellowships.

For instance, their leaders build up what we might call a personality cult, setting themselves forth as virtual messiahs and wonder-men. Men with charisma often exercise harsh, autocratic control over the laity, demanding submission and threatening dire punishment for failure to obey.

They often claim to be exclusive possessors of the truth, make prideful claims to certain distinctives, and criticize all other groups that disagree. Some claim to combine the best of other doctrines and thus to be the final word. They imply that no one can be fully happy until he is initiated into their mysteries.

They try to isolate their members from all other teachers, from all others who profess to be believers and from books written by others than their own leaders.

They often prescribe a legalistic lifestyle that becomes a system of bondage. They equate holiness with certain rituals and observances which men can do by their own strength rather than by divine life.

They exploit the people financially by a system of clever psychological manipulations. The leaders live in splendor and luxury, while many of the people are reduced to near poverty.

Many of the cults are sheep-stealers, conducting raids on other religious institutions rather than trying to reach the unchurched.

They overemphasize one doctrine or a few doctrines, completely neglecting vital areas of divine revelation.

They treat those who teach the truth as enemies. Thus Paul asked the legalistic Galatians, “Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” (Gal. 4:16).

It is unfortunate that any of these attitudes or acts should ever creep into sound Christian fellowships, but as long we are in the body, we all have to guard against them zealously.

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